

Art + Science Series
Photography 2: What makes a good photograph?
Grades 5-8

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Teacher note:

Please bring pencils and copies of the “*What is he doing with that camera?*” activity sheet to your videoconferencing site.

Art + Science Series

Photography 2: What makes a good photograph?

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Program and Teaching Extension Objectives:

- Students will understand how considerations such as focus, framing, point of view, lighting, time and subject matter can influence meaning in a photograph.
- Students will compare and contrast images taken by contemporary photographers to photographers of historical significance.
- Students will learn and understand how to use photographs as a stimulus for the creative writing process.
- Students will learn how photographs can help people recall moments in personal history.

National Education Standards:

For Visual Arts Education (grades 5-8):

- Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas
- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others
- Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

For Language Arts - English (grades K-12):

- Communication skills
- Communication strategies
- Applying knowledge
- Evaluating data

Photography has been called the most democratic of the visual arts because virtually anyone can do it. To initiate critical thinking about photography as a form of visual communication, ask students questions such as, “Why do people like taking photographs?” What are the different places they see photographs and what is their purpose (such as scientific, journalistic, fashion, advertising, entertainment, artistic, etc.)? What would our world be like without photography?

No matter what the purpose, the photographer must consider how to arrange the subject within the image frame. The way this subject is photographed is as important as the subject itself in communicating the photographer’s intent to the viewer. In this program, we will look at simple techniques that students can use to affect the outcome of their images.

Supplies needed for videoconference:

- For each student – Photocopy of “*What is he doing with that camera?*” activity sheet
- Pencils

Vocabulary:

Aperture – A circular opening that controls the amount of light entering the camera.

Camera – A machine that uses a lens or small opening to record light on a sensitized material.

Depth of field – The area of a picture that is in focus.

Elements of art – Those that apply to photography are [color](#), [value](#), [line](#), [shape](#), [texture](#) and [pattern](#).

Exposure - The amount of light striking the film when a photograph is taken.

Focus – The clarity or clearness of an image.

Framing – What a photographer chooses to leave in or out of the image area.

Point of view – The position or [angle](#) from which something is seen.

Value – The lightness or darkness of a color.

Pinhole camera – A very simple camera with no lens other than a hole (or aperture) made with a pin.

Teaching Extensions:

1. *What Makes a Good Photograph? Display (visual arts)*

Explanation: Create a display of images taken from newspapers and magazines to reinforce concepts learned in the distance learning program.

Materials: *several copies of Sunday newspapers and magazines appropriate for grade level, scissors, display surface such as chart paper, tri-fold board, bulletin board or wall space, adhesive (glue, tape, tacks).*

Process: Divide students into groups. Using newspapers and magazines as their source, each group must find a photograph to represent each of the following categories:

- framing
- point of view
- lighting
- focus
- time
- unique subject

Review these categories with the students using a few pre-cut examples. Explain that some photographs may qualify for more than one category. Students should select the area they believe is best represented in the photograph and be able to validate their decision.

Each student group can display their collections on a bulletin board, chalkboard or other surface that has been divided into the six categories listed above. Poster boards for each category may also be placed around the room as an alternate display method. During discussion, group members could take turns placing a photograph in the category it represents and explain why they believe it belongs there.

2. Create a Shared Memory Exhibit (visual arts, language arts)

Explanation: There are often multiple generations of friends and family members connected to the school a child attends. This project allows students to discover these connections through written and oral history, as well as practice concepts learned in photographic composition.

Materials: *35mm disposable cameras with electronic flash or digital cameras if available; computer with photographic editing software, scanner and color printer; historical memorabilia such as yearbooks, trophies, awards.*

Process: Have students walk around the exterior of your school building, paying close attention to architectural details they may not have noticed before. Is there evidence of additions to the original building? Are there details such as a cornerstone or plaque that would identify when the school was constructed? Where is the main entrance? Has it always been there or can another doorway be identified as the original entrance? Ask students record these views with photographs, paying close attention to point of view, framing, and lighting, as well as the elements of art evident in the scene.

As students walk around the school, have them observe the neighborhood. Can they identify structures built in the same era as the school? Are there buildings that appear to be more modern? What activities do they observe? Is it a residential or a business neighborhood? Have students use their cameras to record these views, again paying attention to their point of view, framing, and lighting used to make a dynamic photograph.

A walk through the interior of the building may also reveal changes over the years. Record areas where many students congregate, such as auditoriums, gymnasiums, cafeterias, hallways, stairwells and classrooms with specific purposes such as science labs, music and art rooms. Ask students to pay attention to unique subject matter, time and point of view when composing their photographs.

If using digital technology, photographs can be downloaded and printed on a school computer. For best results, obtain glossy photographic paper suitable for use in your computer's printer, an image size from 5 x 7" to 8" x 10", and image resolution of 200 dpi. If using disposable cameras, your photo processor may be able to provide a photo CD of your students' images for you to output on your school's computer, or you can have them provide photographic prints.

Display the photographs during an event where many people will see them, such as your school's open house, conference days, performances and so forth. Set up a table near the display where the photography students can ask people to write down any memories evoked by the displayed photographs. These oral histories could also be recorded on video or audio tape and archived in the school library for future generations. An album of the student photographs and written recollections could also be compiled and reserved. Future students can add to and learn from the album.

Alternate process for newer schools or communities: Ask students to take photographs illustrating scenes typical of a week in the life of their school that demonstrate their understanding of the concepts of point of view, framing, focus, portrayal of time, lighting and the unique subject.

3. Black & White vs. Color: Compare and Contrast (visual arts)

Exercise: Using subjects available during the school day, such as classroom activities, the cafeteria social scene and sporting events, have students take a series of photographs which illustrate the six photographic concepts (framing, point of view, unique subject, time, focus, lighting) discussed in the distance learning lesson.

If using digital cameras:

Materials: *digital camera(s), computer with image editing software, color printer.*

Students should transfer images to your school's computer and print a full color version, as well as a black & white version of selected photographs. Have students compare and contrast the results: how are the black and white versions similar to the color – how are they different? Do they evoke different emotions? Are art elements such as texture, line, shape or value more noticeable with the addition or subtraction of color?

If using disposable cameras:

Materials: *disposable cameras, ½ with color film, ½ with black & white film; film processing lab services*

Students should work in pairs (one with a disposable camera with black & white film, one with a disposable camera with color film) to shoot the same subject from the same viewpoint. Process the film to 4 x 6" images and have students compare and contrast the results of the same-subject pairs: How are the black & white versions similar to the color – how are they different? Do they

evoke different emotions? Are some details more noticeable with the addition or subtraction of color?

4. *Creative Writing Prompt using Photography (language arts)*

Use photographs created during the activities listed above, or students' family photographs as idea starters for creative writing. In order for students to dismiss preconceived ideas about the nature of each photograph and develop objective looking skills, ask groups of students to exchange pictures so they are not using their own photograph for their writing. They should choose a photograph that interests them, and then create a web of observations and ideas generated by looking carefully at the photograph. Have students read through the ideas, choose one which interests them, and then write a short story. If digital images were used, the photograph can be inserted in a word processing application such as Microsoft Word along with the story. Mount the photographs and stories together for display on a bulletin board, or place in binders for students to read and share with one another.

Additional Resources:

Books for Students:

Johnson, Neil. *National Geographic Photography Guide for Kids*. National Geographic Society. 2001.

Varriale, Jim. *Take a Look Around: Photography Activities for Young People*. Brookfield, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press. 1999.

Weed, Paula and Jimison, Carla. *Tricky Pix: Do It Yourself Trick Photography* (with camera). Klutz, Inc. 2001.

Books for Teachers:

Ang, Tom. *Digital Photography: An Introduction*. New York: DK Publishing Inc. 2003.

A City Seen: Photographs from the George Gund Foundation Collection. Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art. 2002.

Hinson, Tom. *Catalogue of Photography*. Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art. 1996.

Ewald, Wendy and Lightfoot, Alexandra. *I Wanna Take Me a Picture: Teaching Photography and Writing to Children*. Boston: Beacon Press Books. 2001.

Goldberg, Vicki and Silberman, Robert. *American Photography: a Century of Images*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books. 1999.

Newhall, Beaumont. *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the Present*. New York: Museum of Modern Art. 5th ed. 2002.

Hedgecoe, John. *The Photographer's Handbook*. New York: Knopf. 1992.

The Camera, by the editors of *Time-Life Books*. Alexandria: Time-Life Books. 1970, 1981.

Websites:

Ansel Adams at 100

<http://www.sfmoma.org/adams/>

Multimedia program organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art focuses on seven photographs by Ansel Adams which reveal the thought process and history underlying his image making decisions. An excellent site for adults or older students; gives history on Mount Williamson image

American Photography: A Century of Images / Image Lab

www.pbs.org/ktca/americanphotography/imagelab/imagelab_home.html

Interactive portion of PBS website on the history of American photography lets upper middle school students examine how photographs change meaning through cropping, the “truth” of digital manipulation, as well as go on a “virtual photo shoot” with Dorothea Lange, known for her documentary photography for the FSA.

Center for Creative Photography: Learning to Look

<http://www.creativephotography.org/>

Part of the University of Arizona, this site is designed to help educators teach students how to interpret photographs through formal art criticism and thought-provoking questions.

Eastman Kodak

www.kodak.com

Comprehensive website provides information on cameras and film, as well as sections on “Taking Great Photos”, extensive lesson plan section and biography of George Eastman (access through “search” feature).

Get the Picture: Thinking About Photographs

<http://www.artsmia.org/get-the-picture/>

Interactive exploration of images from the permanent collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Many of photographs feature interactive demonstrations that cover formal image-making aspects such as lighting, depth of field, photographic perspective, as well as their art historical context. Suitable for older students or adults.

National Geographic: Photography

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/>

Informative website section for teachers and students which includes photo galleries and multimedia slide shows, section on Photo fun (quirky old and new photographs not seen in the magazine), and frequently asked questions on photography.

Digital or Non-Digital?

Digital cameras have several advantages when working with students.

1. Immediate decisions on keeping or discarding a photo can be made before developing.
2. Cropping and changes to image size can be done on a computer.
3. Photographs can be printed in either black & white or color.

Disposable cameras have advantages as well:

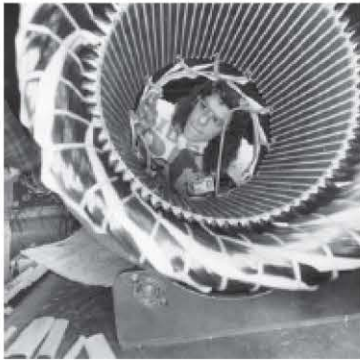
1. Low camera cost eliminates risk of damage.
2. No computer skills needed on the part of instructor or student.

The Art + Science Series: Photography was co-written by Lorain, Ohio Middle School teachers Colette Buck and Jennifer Vincenty.

DATE _____

ASSIGNMENT

FILE NO. _____

what is he doing with that camera?**A** 1 2 3 4 5 6**B** 1 2 3 4 5 6**C** 1 2 3 4 5 6**D** 1 2 3 4 5 6**E** 1 2 3 4 5 6**F** 1 2 3 4 5 6**G** 1 2 3 4 5 6

As a photographer, you make many decisions about what the final picture will look like — even before you press the shutter button!

Look at the six categories listed below, then look at the photographs. Which of the categories do you think the photographer was most concerned with in each photo? Circle the number!

- 1 FOCUS:** Does the sharpness or fuzziness of the photo help communicate a feeling?
- 2 LIGHTING:** Is the photographer using shadows and light to set a mood?
- 3 POINT OF VIEW:** Is there a low, high, or unusual way of looking at the subject?
- 4 FRAMING:** Does the photographer using what's around the edges of the photograph to give us information?
- 5 TIME:** Does the photograph show or freeze movement?
- 6 UNIQUE SUBJECT:** Is the subject a person, place, thing or event that is not seen every day?